

important and vital role that religion would play in our society, and they would also recognize that we do not need government interfering with it. We do not need government funding it.

Indeed, that is why hundreds of religious leaders, who are doing innovative work—enriching and changing lives across this country, have opposed this bill. Because they are doing their good deeds, they are living their faith and their religion, and they do not even need the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) to come in and pass a bill to let them do it.

Today is a referendum on discrimination. We will have a vote today on which the Members of this House will have an opportunity to say whether they want to spend Federal tax dollars to encourage discrimination in employment or not. And the second matter, the ultimate faith-based initiative today is on the issue of fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, these Republicans are draining the Medicare Trust Fund as quickly as they can turn the spigot. And when they get through emptying it, they are moving next to the Social Security Trust Fund. That is why rather than remaining true to recent Republican pledges to “lockbox” Medicare, The Director of the Office of Management and Budget calls the Medicare Trust Fund “a fiction.” Indeed, the real fiction is the claim that Republicans can provide tax breaks like this and maintain any sense of fiscal responsibility.

If we think that the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) can keep coming in here, week after week, with one special interest tax break after another, today for those that helped in getting out the Republican vote last year in certain parts of the religious community, and next week with the breaks for the oil, gas industry nuclear and coal industries, if we think that he can provide all of those tax breaks and not pay for or provide offsets for a single one of them without invading the Medicare Trust Fund and the Social Security Trust Fund, Mr. Speaker, if we think he can accomplish that, we are really investing the ultimate faith-based initiative.

Mr. THOMAS. And the Democrats’ sorrow pile grows and grows.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS).

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, not every human need and social problem requires a government program. There are many charitable, nongovernmental, nonprofit, humanitarian and faith-based programs that work, that are very effective. President Bush has recognized the power of faith-based organizations, and he has challenged America to harness this power. He points to groups like Teen Challenge that operate in Pennsylvania for over 40 years. It has an 86 percent success rate in drug and alcohol rehab, and they track

their graduates for 7 years after they graduate. The government programs we fund have a 6 to 10 percent success rate. Clearly, there is a difference.

President Johnson waged a war on poverty. We have declared a war on drugs. We have not won those wars. That is because the real problems of this country are not money problems, they are problems of the spirit. Government cannot create a work ethic or make people moral or make people love one another or pray, renew communities. Government cannot address the basic problems which are problems of the spirit, and these faith-based programs can. Let them have a place at the table with their conscience.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield 10 seconds to the articulate gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK).

Mr. FRANK. Mr. Speaker, there is a flaw in several of the things we have heard. The bill specifically says we cannot have a religious and theological content in the program. Those who say that the importance is to use religion to improve people’s lives have not read the bill.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF).

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, religious institutions have always played a vital role in serving the needs of society’s most vulnerable members, our children, the poor, the disabled, the dispirited, not out of a motivation for public funding but driven by the beneficent dictates of their faith. That work goes on. It must go on. I applaud the administration for the desire to further this goal.

But this bill is not the way. Providing Federal funding directly or indirectly through a massive multi-billion dollar voucher program, practically without restriction, for religious or nonreligious activities related to the delivery of social service runs squarely into conflict with our Constitution.

Why does that matter? Perhaps the Founding Fathers got it wrong. Because there should be no separation of church and State. Perhaps the Founding Fathers were simply antagonistic to religion. No, they were not. The right of free exercise of religion and against the establishment of religion protected in our Bill of Rights are intertwined rights. They are inseparable. Allow the establishment of religion, and we do away with the free exercise of religion. Allow the excessive entanglement of church and State as represented in this bill, and we do not serve church or State.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS).

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I think all of us should reflect a little bit and realize that four bills were signed by President Clinton that had charitable

choice in them and they passed overwhelmingly. I suspect that a lot of people that are debating this voted for those bills, because they passed 345 to whatever was left.

Proponents of the idea to substitute their own bill always talk about our bill violates the first amendment, and this is a very relevant question. It demands some serious consideration. Those who support the idea that they want to put in another bill because ours violates the first amendment do so because they believe in the first amendment, but we all do. The Constitution provides, “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

But this charge is twofold. The first amendment provides that the government cannot establish one religion or a religion over a nonreligion. But it also, I say to my colleagues, provides that the government shall not prohibit the free exercise of religion.

This is a very important point and the purpose of our bill. With some constitutional concerns in mind, we must make certain to allow members of organizations seeking to take part in government programs designed to meet basic human needs and ensure that capable and qualified organizations not be discriminated against on the basis of their religious views.

So charitable choice makes clear that existing Federal law providing for the Federal provision of social services should not be read to exclude. One cannot exclude faith-based organizations solely on the basis of their beliefs.

So I would conclude, Mr. Speaker, to point out that what we are trying to do is exercise freedom of religion, and that is what charitable choice does.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This amendment was put out here for a very simple purpose. The Republicans have been acting like they had a \$500 bank account and they were going to write ten \$100 checks; and that is what the Committee on Ways and Means Chairman led by the Committee on Ways and Means Republicans has done, over and over again.

We received a letter from the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE) on July 11 that said that the surplus remaining was \$12 billion. Now, the President has yet to submit a defense request to us. The lowest estimate anybody has heard is that he wants \$10 billion. So if we just imagine taking 12 and subtracting 10, we now have \$2 billion left in surplus, and so then we are almost into Social Security and Medicare. Okay?

Now, we also have stuff coming out of the CBO and the Committee on Joint Taxation telling us that the economy has slowed down and the revenue estimates are going down. A very conservative estimate of how far down they have gone is \$20 billion. Now, remember, we have that \$2 billion left, we subtract another 20, we are \$18 billion into the surplus in Medicare.